

# NOTES AND NEWS

Land survey urged — Public pulse on welfare — Land speculation in Languedoc — Grand building, grand taxes — The land factor in housing



## THIN END OF THE WEDGE

**A** CALL for a full-scale survey of land ownership in the United Kingdom is made by Dr. D. R. Denman, head of Cambridge University's Land Economy Department, in an article entitled "Need for National Land Register" in *The Times*, August 21. We know less about how our land resources are owned than our forebears knew of the distribution of land in the eleventh century says Dr. Denman, and there has been only one attempt to complete a systematic record of the ownership of land in England and Wales since the Domesday Inquest of 1085. The second attempt was in 1875, when an analysis of the ownership of property was made from the rating returns.

Dr. Denman considers that although such a cadastral survey would be a big undertaking, "... it should not daunt us, and, measured against the benefits to be derived, the difficulties should prove more of a challenge than a check."

He observes that land owners would at first probably object to the idea. But, he argues, it would be largely in their own interests to have such a survey. Landlords as a class have been much maligned, and it is getting increasingly difficult for the public mind to disassociate the *Rachman*-type landlord from the majority who do not indulge in the racketeering that has made *Rachman* and his kind notorious.

Dr. Denman makes the important point that although the present pattern of land ownership would be illuminating and exceedingly valuable, it would not be enough. A survey built up from registered transactions of land would be necessary, and it would be "ten times as effective, revealing, as it would, changes in ownership over short and long periods of time," (And it would be indispensable for future valuations. *Ed.*) "Current and future changes could be taken care of by requiring all property transactions to be recorded and mapped in county registers."

Claims that large estates have been broken up by taxation, says Dr. Denman, can be offset by the belief that anticipation of estate duties has also had the opposite effect, and stimulated the amassing of rural holdings into extensive estates.

"Without a cadastral survey," says the writer, "the task of ascertaining who the land owners are and the intricacies of the property rights is formidable... Nobody knows the truth, and nor will it be known with certainty until property interests and changes in title are fully recorded."

Although Dr. Denman writes of rents and property so

as to make no distinction between income from land (in the Ricardian sense) and income from buildings, he is not unmindful of this distinction.

The first requirement of an Act to tax land values will, of course, be a cadastral survey. Dr. Denman comments thus: "The need (for a survey) will be even greater should we ever suffer a tax on land values *per se*. A specific proprietary tax of this order could work special mischief among the traditional land owners for whom the land is a major constituent of fortune and the primary concern of their care."

## CHOICE IN WELFARE

**T**O THE LAYMAN, the controversy over the validity and wisdom of public opinion polls is quite bewildering. Whenever the results of a survey are published, the academics leap at one another's throats with speed and ferocity.

The first line of attack is directed at the method of choice of the "sample". It would appear that any "sample" can be criticised on the grounds of being "unrepresentative" of the population, particularly with regard to age, income group and political leanings. If it is difficult to find fault with the "sample," an attack can be launched on the questionnaire. The questions can be "loaded," "unbalanced," too complex, or lacking in "depth." Failing to substantiate criticism at this level, the aggressor may then turn to the analysis of the findings, and in the last resort he can accuse the interviewers of pressurising or the interviewees of lying. Nevertheless, it is a fact, however remarkable, that public opinion polls are here to stay. To what extent the polls tend to form opinion rather than reflect it, is, perhaps, open to debate.

Long established as a means of taking the public pulse in competitive merchandising and political popularity, the arrival of the "poll" into the sombre world of state-provided social services might be described as a "break-through." A noble attempt has been made by the Institute of Economic Affairs to ascertain what proportion of the population would prefer a choice between state-provided and privately-sponsored services in education, health and retirement provision.\* The findings of the poll suggest that slightly over half of the population would favour policies enabling the state provisions to be supplemented or replaced by private services. The report recognises that this survey is exploratory and that follow-ups are required to ascertain how far these preferences were due to knowledge

\**Choice in Welfare*. Institute of Economic Affairs. 42s.